




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION (COMBATING COERCIVE CONTROL) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (3.11 pm): I say that there are moments in this House—and I know that the minister, the member for Ferny Grove, said the same—where you feel very proud standing up talking to a bill, and there is no doubt that this is one of those bills. I think it is going to make a real difference. Women make up 50 per cent of the cabinet in the Palaszczuk government, and we have a large number of women in the caucus. I am going to be so bold as to say that changes like this come about because women's voices are being heard. It is so good to have a female Attorney-General who is now putting these recommendations, demonstrating the commitment of our cabinet, our caucus and our government to preventing domestic and family violence from occurring in our communities, which is why we are starting to legislate against coercive control.

The bill gives effect to recommendations 52 to 60 and 63 to 66 of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce's first report. It amends the Criminal Code, the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act, the Evidence Act, the Penalties and Sentences Act and the Youth Justice Act which goes to show how many pieces of legislation we have to amend to bring this about. The critical amendments in this legislation will ensure the coercive control offence will be effective in reducing domestic and family violence, while also mitigating unintended consequences such as the misidentification of the primary aggressor and experience of First Nations women and girls.

I take the work of Grace Tame. If she has done anything, she has made it clear that language is important in this area, and how things are labelled and how they are written into legislation makes a great deal of difference. We have listened to Grace Tame and I commend her. I take the member for Southport's comment when he said her contribution to this debate was very good even though he had reservations possibly, which we all have, but it was great that he was able to say that that came across. I think, if anything, that has come across.

The bill amends the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act to include a pattern of behaviour in the definition of 'domestic violence'. How important is that? The fact that we can now look at the behaviour which goes on and see that it is not just one event but a series of things that is causing concern to women—and men, but largely women—in relation to this issue is a great step in the right direction.

Domestic violence includes behaviour that occurs over a period of time as well. It includes individual acts that, when considered together, are abusive, threatening, coercive or cause fear. How many stories from constituents have I heard that reflect those words which I have just read out? The aim of this piece of legislation is to shift the focus from responding to single incidents of violence to the dangerous patterns of abusive behaviour that occur over time. We only have to be reminded of the

horrific violence against Hannah Clarke and her children to understand that where there is this pattern, something needs to be done; some intervention needs to happen to prevent such horrific acts from occurring.

Domestic and family violence is a scourge on our society, there is no doubt about it. I lament sometimes when I hear people's stories. I want to share one from one of my constituents—I will call her Pam—who is an elderly woman who continually experienced this kind of behaviour in the old-fashioned way and then in the modern way. Pam was sharing her stories with me. She would ring me regularly to tell me about her frustrations, what was happening, and then I think realising the pattern of behaviour that, in a way, she either overlooked or ignored for far too long. If anything, this highlights to women what is unacceptable; that if you are in this situation, address it. Try and do something: seek assistance, speak to a loved one, speak to a friend, or indeed even speak to your member of parliament the way Pam spoke to me. I want to say to Pam that I listened. In a way, speaking from the heart today is a reflection of Pam's story that she has shared with me which I will take to my grave. I hope that the government is moving to address this issue gives her comfort.

When it comes to respectful relationships, education is key. This is why in March 2021, after hearing what was happening in federal parliament, I instigated a comprehensive review to make sure we were delivering the best age-appropriate resources and materials to our schools. We consulted more than 180 stakeholders, including subject matter experts, parents, teachers, principals and, more importantly, students themselves. Students told me directly that they want to talk about consent in a direct way. They want to talk about what makes a respectful relationship. They do not want euphemisms and they do not want gimmicks. They want to be engaged in discussions that will help them to respond to real-life issues.

Last year we delivered an updated and upgraded suite of resources for delivery this year in our schools. This is being done in an age-appropriate way. We are sharing these resources with independent and Catholic schools because we know that education is the key to a respectful relationship. I tend to think that it is commonsense to know when one is being kind, obsessive or restrictive, and that people can identify when their actions may not reflect how they should be treating another human being, but quite clearly there are too many instances where people are not identifying that this is the case, or there is something that is preventing them from stopping themselves doing what they are doing.

We have put \$15.5 million behind this to fund professional development for teachers. We have eight specialist advisers in the field now, one for each region, and one in head office. We are hoping that starting this in an age-appropriate manner and in a manner where we can deliver straight talking to students about what constitutes a respectful relationship will go a long way.

Obviously laws need to keep up. In relation to our handheld devices—our mobile phones—when I was growing up there were no such things. Unfortunately, they have almost become a weapon in their own right with some people constantly being harassed on them, stalked on them et cetera. Laws need to keep up. I congratulate the Attorney-General on bringing this forward and updating our laws to reflect the use of modern technology.

We are amending the offence of stalking to capture technology facilitated domestic violence. That is a step in the right direction. We are bringing domestic violence victims and other witnesses within the protected witness scheme. We are allowing for domestic violence history to be considered at sentence as bad character evidence, and so it should be. For far too long these people have been perpetrating against different victims or on more than one occasion and that history was not able to be brought in. This is correcting that.

A particular section in the Criminal Code will change from maintaining a sexual relationship—and this is where words and labels are very important—with a child to repeated sexual conduct with a child, and the term 'carnal knowledge' will be replaced by more modern terminology. I cannot express how much I support these amendments. Coercive control is insidious. I am lucky to stand here and say I have not been a victim of it, but not many can say that. Anything we can do to bring this out into the public light to address it, to make sure that it is taken into account and to stop this from harming women is a step in the right direction. I commend the bill to the House.